

ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Professor Marcus Felson

Course Codes:	19393 – 7350-B– Section 001
Location:	Hines 201
Time:	6:30 PM to 9:20 Thursday
Hours:	<i>Email me any day about meeting the next day, or meet me after class</i>
Email:	mf38 @ txstate.edu
Office:	110 Hill House
Mailbox:	Lounge, Hines Hall
Requirements:	Attendance, weekly assignments, and submittable paper Readings are from journals on Texas State Library site

STRATEGY FOR THIS COURSE

The purpose of this course is to prepare you for carrying out professional academic research that leads to published articles. The goal is for each student to produce a submittable article, or at least to learn how to do so. The practical problem we face is that one semester might not suffice to meet that goal for each student. So here's a plan. Some of you will have a paper on hand that could be crafted and formed into a submittable paper. Others will have to start at ground zero. Others will start somewhere in between. For all of you the goal will be to move you along as far as possible during the semester, while each of you participates in the progress of every other student. Thus each of you will have a broader vicarious experience than your own paper alone. Each of you will critique the work of others and help others to move their work forward. Each of you will learn how to process and use criticism to your own advantage, thus to make constructive progress. Each of you will help the others improve their writing and communication. And each of you will learn from the sharing process. I will remain committed to each of you after the semester ends, helping you move your work along to a submittable stage.

The central task will be to get each of you to start well. That means having a manageable project that really can be done, that really can lead to a feasible research article that does not wander here, there, and everywhere. I will help you hone a general concept or idea into a true research topic.

All of our assignments feed into the broader goal of learning how to focus research and writing, to move knowledge forward, to get something publishable while making sure you and your readers really learn something. I will also help you find a balance between what's substantive and what's practical, so you learn some devices without becoming artificial. A sense of balance is essential.

In this course you will learn something about how to do a project, how to write an article, and how to get it accepted, revised, and published. I cannot get each of you through all these stages in one semester. I cannot teach you statistics and methods, too. But I can give you some tips, such as how to make sure your data file really is workable, how to check your marginals and run simple crosstabs to learn early whether your idea has any hope of being feasible. You would be surprised how many researchers paint themselves in the corner and end up spending a year or more on a project that is destined to fail. I will show you how to protect yourself so that does not happen.

Here are some of the specific tasks this course will work on:

1. Distinguishing a scientific article from a classroom paper
2. Distinguishing a research article from an essay
3. The importance of motivating yourself with a real project
4. The importance of finding your own niche, not just imitating others
5. Whether to pick your niche now, or let it unfold after the current paper
6. How to pick a viable topic for the current paper
7. How to do something that is in some sense new
8. How to do something old that's still new
9. How to make secondary analysis fresh
10. How to use middle range theory, rather than grand theory, for a viable research article
11. How to state a theoretical question that doesn't sound pedantic
12. How to pick a working title
13. How to test the literature
14. How to find a dataset
15. How to check the sample and questionnaire
16. How to test the dataset
17. How to narrow the topic further
18. How to start the research
19. How to regroup and redirect the research
20. How to do a backup plan
21. How to do a dummy table
22. How to subset in order to focus your study
23. How to organize the data
24. What tables to run first
25. What statistics to end up with
26. How to trim data
27. How to do a sensitivity analysis
28. How to do a table
29. How to write up a table

30. How to write up a literature review
31. How to separate background literature from foreground literature
32. How to decide what ideas should go up front and what ideas at the end
33. How to make paragraphs feed into each other
34. How to do headings and subheadings
35. How to be interesting without overpromising or overclaiming
36. How to write an abstract
37. How to find a title that brings readers
38. How to pick a journal
39. How to submit
40. Cover letter
41. How to deal with criticism
42. How to do a revise and resubmit chart
43. How to make revise and resubmit decisions
44. How to present a paper at a meeting
45. How to do a really good powerpoint
46. How to be suitably formal without becoming too pedantic, i.e., to avoid boring everybody to death, while still covering your bases

We will draw routinely from these five journals via the Library website:

- a. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency *
- b. Journal of Quantitative Criminology *
- c. Journal of Experimental Criminology *
- d. Criminology**
- e. Public Opinion Quarterly***

(*) uses new abstract style

(**) uses old abstract style

(***) special attention to abstracts by editors

First assignment:

Copy eight abstracts from the past two years from each of the four criminology journals above (leave out Public Opinion Quarterly in this assignment). That makes 32 abstracts in all. Evaluate these 32 abstracts for clarity, focus, and whether they invite you to read or discourage you from reading the article. You are welcome to communicate so you don't overlap too much on choices, and to trade ideas informally. You will each be called on in class to talk about what you learned and think. Due next time.

END SYLLABUS